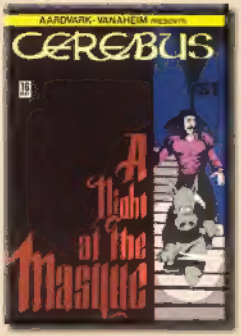

Sir Real's

UNDERGROUND COMIX CLASSIX

Cerebus #16

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Denise Loubert - 1, 3-22+
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Robert Spina - 25(letter)
Terry Whitehead - 25(letter)
Joe Zabel - 25(letter)
Charles Garofalo - 26(letter)

Comments:

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM PRESENTS

CEREBUS

16
MAY

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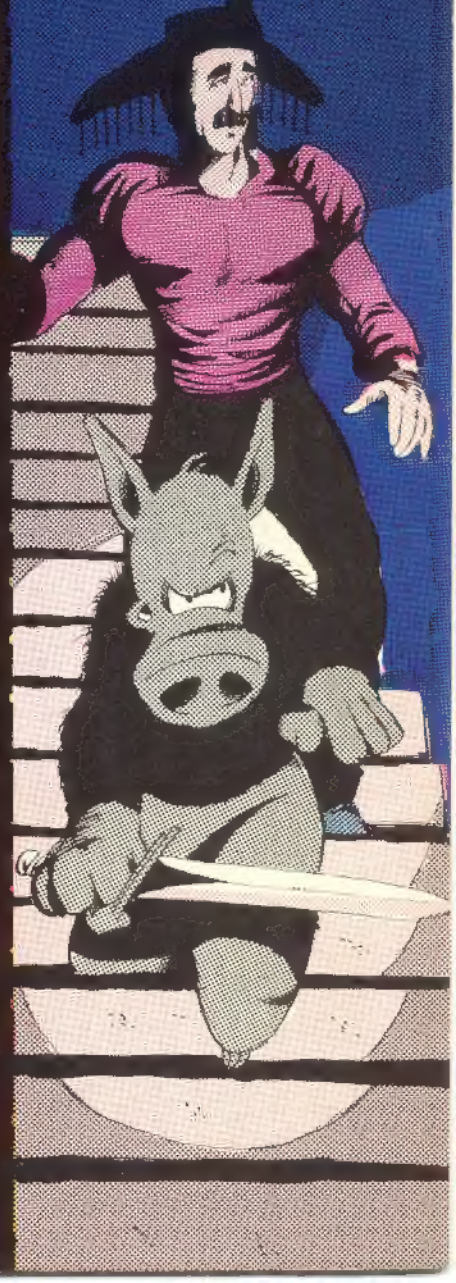

A Night at the Masque

CEREBUS

A Note From The Publisher

This issue should mark a new beginning for CEREBUS, the book. As of this issue we have changed to having Sea Gate Distributors as our exclusive distributor, hoping that this will simplify things all around. We just never realized how easy it is to get behind when you're on a monthly schedule! With only one cheque and only one delivery, things should go smoothly from this point.

I'd like to apologize for the lapse of time between issues 15 and 16. Dave was quite sick and we had to get things arranged with Phil Seuling at Sea Gate. In the midst of all this I was laid off at the job I had just started in January, due to the lack of work. I have some ideas, other plans to try out — but for now I'm unemployed. That made things even more nerve-wracking when added to the pressures of getting this issue out.

This issue is, in some ways, a continuation of no. 15. I feel that Dave can write more interesting plots when he's given several issues to work in, instead of the limited framework of one issue. I'd like to know what you think about this, although I have a feeling that I'll find out from some of you whether I want to or not.

We have gotten someone to do the newsletter and hope to be hearing back from him soon. I'll keep you posted on upcoming news as it comes to me. There's not much else to say except, let's just sit back, watch our little furry friend, and enjoy!!

Denise

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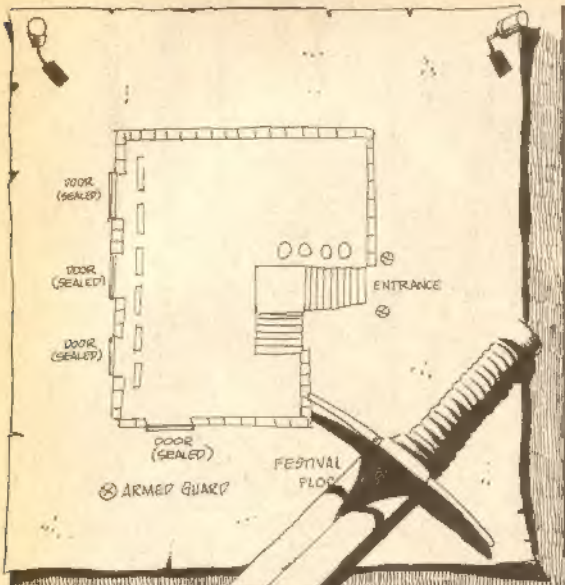
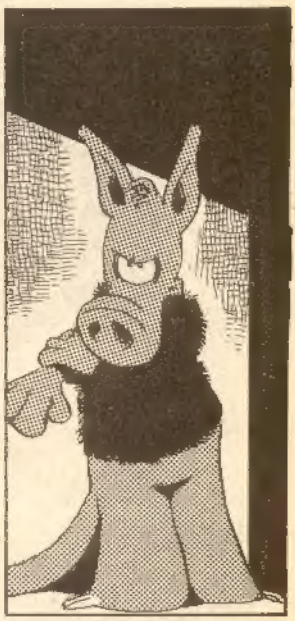


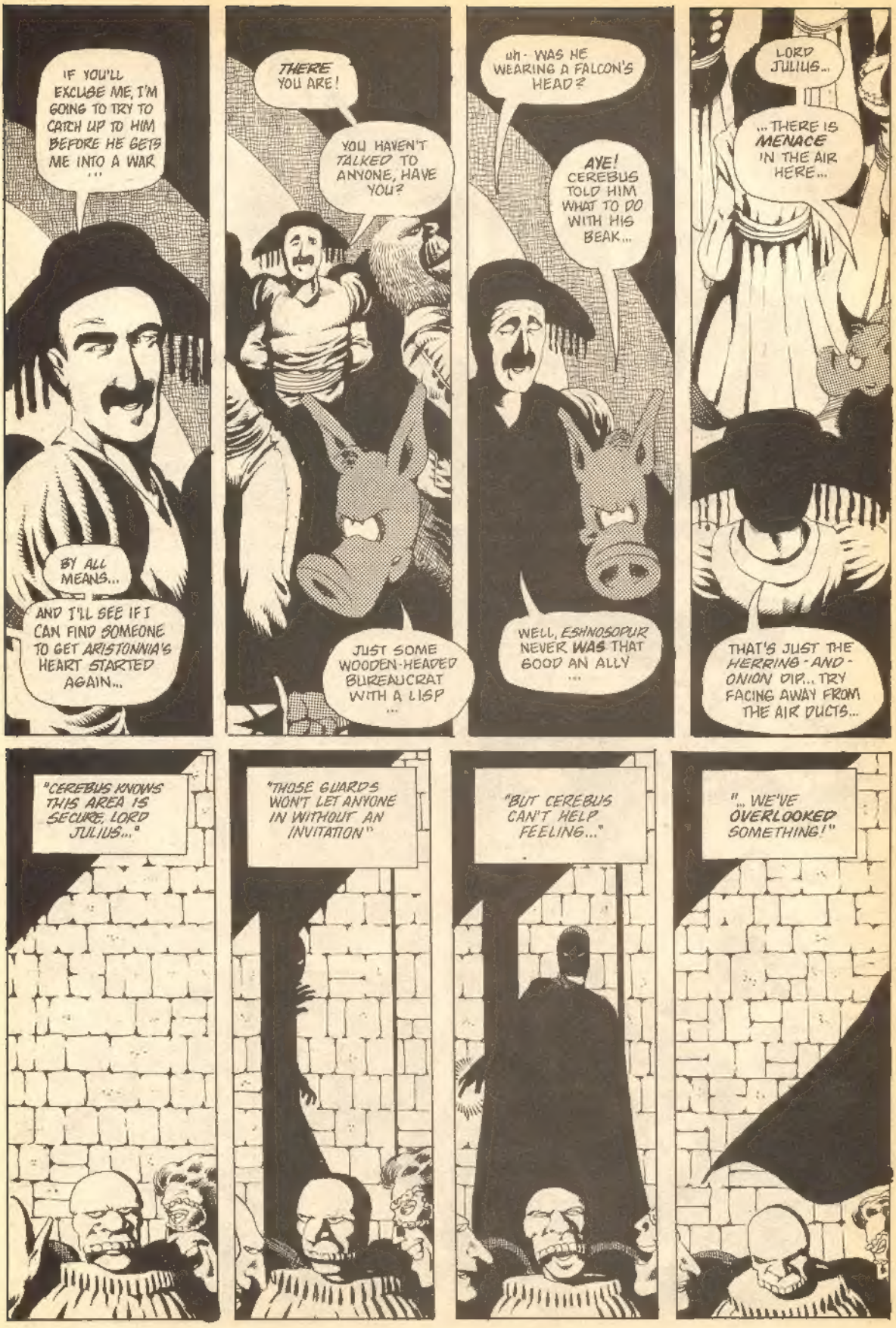
synopsis:

THE ATTACKS ON THE BUREAUCRACY BY THE REVOLUTIONARIES KNOWN ONLY AS THE EYE OF THE PYRAMID HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE FREQUENT! AS THE FESTIVAL OF PETUNIAS NEARS, CEREBUS IS FACED WITH MAKING THE PITS INTO A SAFE LOCATION FOR THE FESTIVITIES! HE INSISTS, OVER LORD JULIUS' GRUMBLING THAT THE GUEST LIST AND FESTIVAL AREA BE CUT IN HALF AND ONLY ONE ENTRANCE BE LEFT UNSEALED! EVEN WITH THESE PRECAUTIONS, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF SAFETY! IF A POTENTIAL ASSASSIN WAS **ON** THE GUEST LIST, HE COULD EASILY STRIKE DOWN THE GRANDLORD OF PALNU AND ESCAPE IN THE CONFUSION! IT IS THE EARTH-PIG'S HOPE THAT JULIUS HAS HEEDED HIS WARNINGS AND WILL KEEP HIMSELF AT A REASONABLE DISTANCE FROM THE CROWD OF PARTY-GOERS...



A NIGHT AT THE MASQUE
TARIM.
CEREBUS MY BOY...
COME IN, COME IN...

WHAT ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE ANYWAY...?
AN AARDVARK WEARING A FURRY BLACK SHIRT...
WELL, YOU'VE GOT MY VOTE FOR "MOST AUTHENTIC COSTUME"...
CEREBUS KNEW THAT, BARELY A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, MEN WERE STILL SEARCHING THE RUBBLE FOR THE REBEL LEADER'S CORPSE. THE EARTH-PIG WAS CERTAIN THEY WOULDN'T FIND IT...
AH! LORD AND LADY WYNDMEL-SMITH...
...YOU'VE MET CEREBUS, MY KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR...?
WHY... NO!
...WE HAVEN'T HAD THE PLEASURE ... HOW DO YOU DO?
CEREBUS HAS NO TIME FOR FAT LADIES...
THERE MAY BE REBELS ABOUT...
I'VE BEEN THINKING THAT HE MIGHT BE A CANDIDATE FOR THAT DIPLOMATIC LIASON POST IN PANROVY...
YOU DON'T SAY...
I... I... uh... I


IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'M GOING TO TRY TO CATCH UP TO HIM BEFORE HE GETS ME INTO A WAR ...
BY ALL MEANS...
AND I'LL SEE IF I CAN FIND SOMEONE TO GET ARISTONNIA'S HEART STARTED AGAIN...
THERE YOU ARE!
YOU HAVEN'T TALKED TO ANYONE, HAVE YOU?
JUST SOME WOODEN-HEADED BUREAUCRAT WITH A LISP ...
uh - WAS HE WEARING A FALCON'S HEAD?
AYE! CEREBUS TOLD HIM WHAT TO DO WITH HIS BEAK...
WELL, ESHNOSOPUR NEVER WAS THAT GOOD AN ALLY ...
LORD JULIUS...
...THERE IS MENACE IN THE AIR HERE...
THAT'S JUST THE HERRING-AND-ONION DIP... TRY FACING AWAY FROM THE AIR DUCTS...
"CEREBUS KNOWS THIS AREA IS SECURE, LORD JULIUS..."
"THOSE GUARDS WON'T LET ANYONE IN WITHOUT AN INVITATION"
"BUT CEREBUS CAN'T HELP FEELING..."
"... WE'VE OVERLOOKED SOMETHING!"

E'LASS! IT'S HIM! IT'S THE-KILLER-WHO-LOOKS-LIKE-A-BUNNY!
SH! THESE TWO INVITATIONS TOOK THE LAST OF OUR MONEY!
IF YOU GET US THROWN OUT, WE LOSE OUR CHANCE AT THE WYNDMEL DIAMOND
AND WITHOUT THAT DIAMOND WE DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY FOR FOOD...
BUT E'LASS -- WHAT IF HE RECOGNIZES ME? HE DOESN'T LIKE ME -- I CAN TELL BY THE WAY HE PUNCHES ME WHENEVER I GET NEAR HIM...*
* CEREBUS #6
JUST KEEP THAT MASK ON, DON'T TALK...
... AND TRY NOT TO MOVE AROUND...
WITH ANY LUCK HE'LL FIGURE YOU'RE A BABY ELM THAT SOMEONE DRESSED UP AS A JOKE...
WHY, LORD JULIUS -- WHAT AN ADORABLE COSTUME...
THE SITUATION WAS HOPELESS THE EARTH-PIG HAD DECIDED ...
THIS OLD THING? I HAD IT PATTERNED ON THE BURIAL COSTUME OF DESERAN THE GAUCHE...
THEY SAY HALF OF THE FUNERAL PARTY WAS NAUSEOUS FOR A WEEK...
...EVEN IF THE LEADER OF THE REVOLUTION WAS HERE, HE COULD BE WEARING ...
TEE-HEE! YOU SAY THE CUTEST THINGS...
DON'T I THOUGH?
UNH?
IT'S HIM!
HE'S EVEN WEARING THE SAME ROBES!

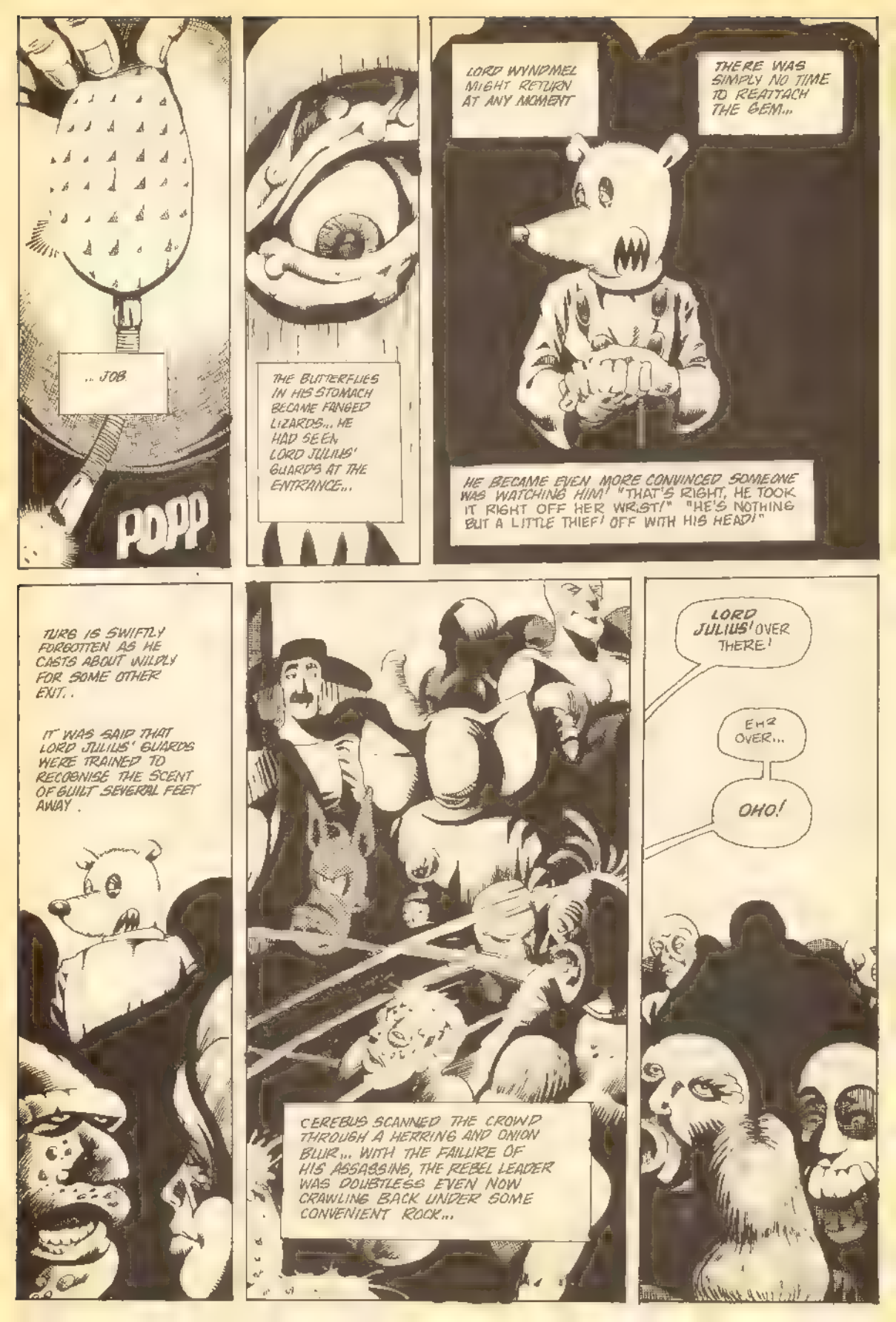
CEREBUS PAUSED.
PERHAPS IT WAS A TRICK...
...A DECOY IN BLACK ROBES TO DRAW HIM AWAY FROM LORD JULIUS...
THE EARTH-PIG SUDDENLY FELT VULNERABLE ...THEY WERE IN THE MIDST OF THE CROWD, FAR FROM THE STONE WALLS AND STAIRWAY...
TACTICALLY, THEIR POSITION WAS A DISASTER...
A MOTION TO THE RIGHT CATCHES CEREBUS' ATTENTION...
GRADUALLY HE BECOMES AWARE THAT THERE ARE ABOUT A DOZEN AMONG THE GUESTS WATCHING HIM INTENTLY...
EACH IS CARRYING A SWORD, AND STEP-BY-CAUTIOUS-STEP, ...
...EACH IS GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO HIM...
HE OPENS HIS MOUTH TO CALL THE GUARDS FROM THEIR POST AT THE ENTRANCE...
UNTIL HE SEES THEM IN THE CROWD, SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH THE REBELS, THEIR SWORDS DRAWN AND SMILES OF BARELY CONCEALED AMUSEMENT ON THEIR FACES

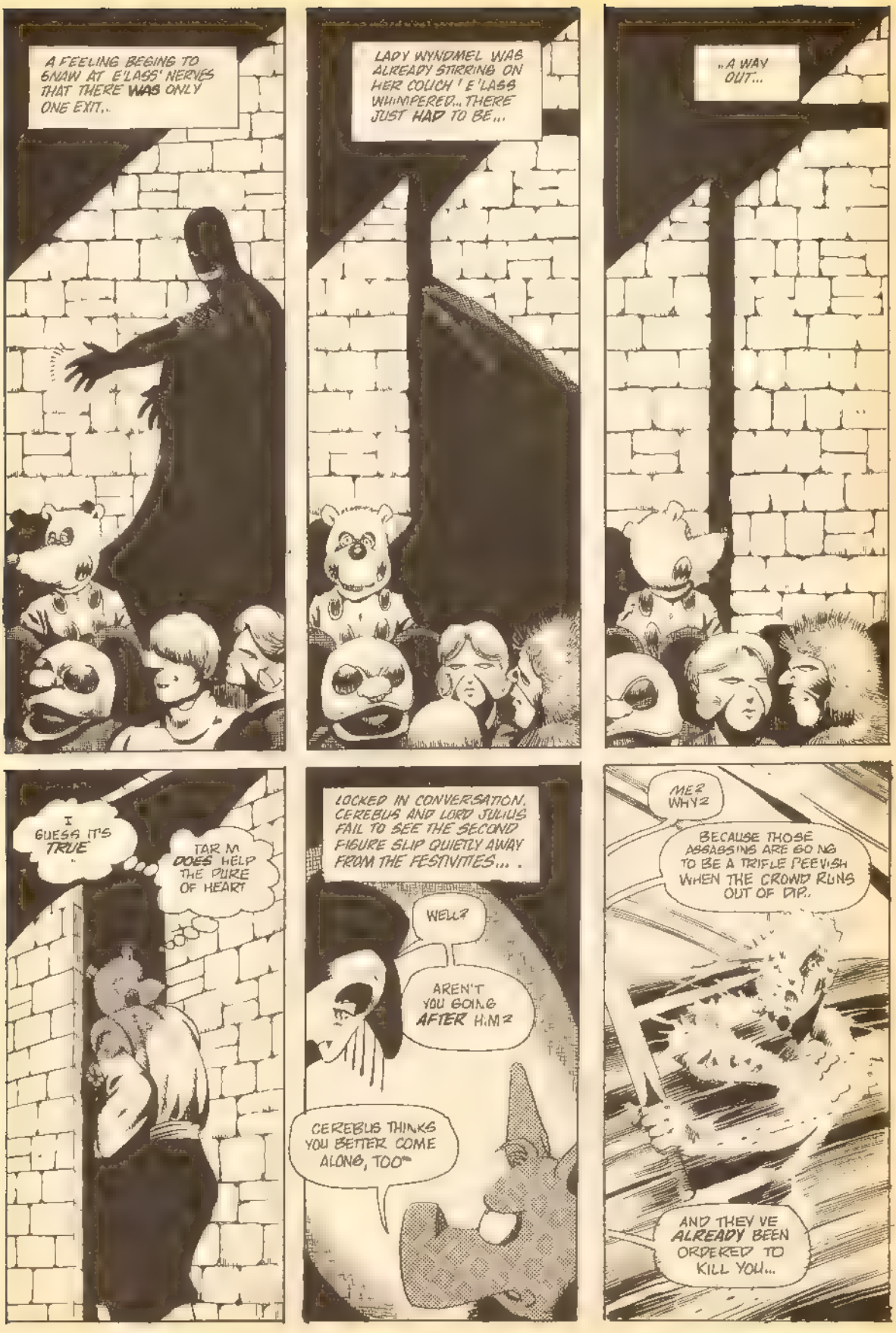
I DON'T WISH TO INTERRUPT LORD JULIUS BUT ARMED REBELS ARE ADVANCING ON US...
WELL, DON'T JUST STAND THERE-- DO SOMETHING...
CEREBUS IS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS
HIS SWORD WOULD BE USELESS AGAINST A DOZEN OPPONENTS! HIS ONLY CHANCE WOULD BE TO GET THE FESTIVAL GUESTS TO TURN ON THE ARMED REVOLUTIONARIES SOMEHOW...
BUT CEREBUS HAD SEEN ENOUGH OF RICH CITY-DWELLERS TO KNOW THAT THEIR INSTINCTIVE REACTION TO ANY WARNING OF DANGER WOULD BE A MINDLESS, FULL-SCALE PANIC...
AND, OUT IN THE OPEN LIKE THIS, A MASS EXODUS TO THE STAIRWAY WOULD FINISH THEM AS SURELY AS THE REBELS' SWORDS...
EVEN IF HE COULD ROUSE A FEW OF THE JADED MERCHANTS TO AID HIM, THE MATERIAL IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE WAS NOT EXACTLY INSPIRING...
HEMMED IN NEXT TO THE REFRESHMENT TABLES, CEREBUS BEGINS TO THINK THAT THE LAST SOUND HE WOULD EVER HEAR WOULD BE THE GRINDING OF MOLARS...
TARIM! IT WOULD TAKE A CROWBAR TO PRY THEIR FEEBLE MINDS AWAY FROM THAT FOUL-SMELLING...

A MOMENT LATER A SLOW GRIN SPREAD ACROSS THE EARTH-PIG'S FEATURES
AND HE PLACED THE SWORD BETWEEN HIS FEET.
ATTENTION, EVERYONE! LORD JJL JS HAS ARRANGED A LITTLE DIVERSION FOR ALL OF US!
I HAVE 2
A GAME! A GAME!
OBOY! A GAME!
I LOVE GAMES!
HE HAS ENGAGED SOME PROFESSIONAL ENTERTAINERS TO JOIN THE FESTIVAL ..THEY'RE THE ONES CARRYING THE SWORDS ...
SAY WHAT THE HELL IS THIS 2
THE OBJECT OF THE GAME IS SIMPLE --
YOU HAVE TO COVER THE ENTERTAINERS FROM HEAD TO FOOT WITH HERRING-AND ONION DIP!
THE FIRST COUPLE WITH AN EMPTY BOWL WILL BE DECLARED KING AND QUEEN OF PETUNIAS..
THE CLOSEST REBEL MUTTERS AN OATH AND RESUMES HIS STEALTHY ADVANCE
RECENTLY ARRIVED IN PALNU, HE, QUITE NATURALLY, IS UNAWARE OF JUST HOW LITTLE IT TAKES TO AMUSE THE CREAM OF PALNU'S MERCHANT CLASS
PLOP

IN SECONDS, THE REBELS ARE THROWN INTO CONFUSION AS THE AIR FILLS WITH BLOBS OF THE FOUL-SMELLING MIXTURE AND BEGINS TO COAT THEIR SKIN AND THEIR CLOTHING...
KEEP THROWING SWEETHEART - ONLY HALF A BOWL TO GO.
I GOT ONE!
SPLAT
PLOOP!
PLAP
IT'S ONE OF LORD JULIUS' TRICKS
GUARD THE EXIT, BROTHER JANUS!
SPLOP
WHIZ
PLAP
GUARD THE EXIT?
YOU MORON--
I CAN'T EVEN SEE THE EXIT!
SLOPP
ZOOOP
PLOOP
WHILE, ACROSS THE ROOM, LADY WYNDMERE SMITH IS STILL RECOVERING FROM HER MEETING WITH A PREOCCUPIED EARTH PIG..
THE IMMIGRATION LAWS SIMPLY MUST BE TIGHTENED, LUCIUS...!
IT'S MY DEAR
PERHAPS YOU'D BE BETTER IF I JUST PUT IT OUT OF YOUR MIND..
MARK MY WORDS! IF SOMETHING ISN'T DONE SOON, WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE HIP-DEEP IN SHORT, ILL-MANNERED FOREIGNERS.
YES, MY DEAR..
WILL YOU BE ALL RIGHT WHILE I GET YOU SOME BRANDY?
KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR! THE IDEA! WHAT MUST LORD JULIUS HAVE BEEN THINKING OF?!

PERHAPS I COULD GET YOU SOME OF THAT DIP WE HAD EARLIER.. ?
LUCIUS! THE DIP! NOW I KNOW WHAT THE WRETCHED CREATURE HAS PLANNED-HE'S GOING TO POISON US ALL!
HE PROBABLY STIRRED IT WITH THOSE LICE INFESTED HANDS OF HIS.. AND .. I I ..ATE...
OOOOOOOH
PERHAPS JUST THE BRANDY, THEN
DON'T GO AWAY, MY DEAR..
PLANCUS CHEWED HIS LIP NERVOUSLY BENEATH HIS MASK.. HE TRIED TO PUSH ALL THOUGHTS OF LORD JULIUS' BOARD OF JUSTICE FROM HIS MIND
THE INFREQUENT INCIDENTS OF CRIME IN PALNU WAS DUE IN LARGE PART TO THIS AUGUST BODY RENOWNED FOR THEIR WISDOM, EXPERIENCE
AND UNBLEMISHED RECORD OF THREE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-ONE CONVICTIONS IN THREE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-ONE TRIALS..
GINGERLY LIFTING THE DIAMOND WITH ONE HAND, HIS RESOLVE CRUMBLES! WHAT IF SOMEONE WAS WATCHING HIM? HE HADN'T PLANNED THOROUGHLY ENOUGH - BETTER TO GET OUT NOW! IF THEY NEEDED MONEY, TURG WOULD JUST HAVE TO GET A ..


.. JOB
POPP
THE BUTTERFLIES IN HIS STOMACH BECAME FANGED LIZARDS... HE HAD SEEN LORD JULIUS' GUARDS AT THE ENTRANCE...
LORD WYNDMEL MIGHT RETURN AT any MOMENT
THERE WAS SIMPLY NO TIME TO REATTACH THE GEM...
HE BECAME EVEN MORE CONVINCED SOMEONE WAS WATCHING HIM! "THAT'S RIGHT, HE TOOK IT RIGHT OFF HER WRIST!" "HE'S NOTHING BUT A LITTLE THIEF! OFF WITH HIS HEAD!"
TURG IS SWIFTLY FORGOTTEN AS HE CASTS ABOUT WILDLY FOR SOME OTHER EXIT..
IT WAS SAID THAT LORD JULIUS' GUARDS WERE TRAINED TO RECOGNISE THE SCENT OF GUILT SEVERAL FEET AWAY .
CEREBUS SCANNED THE CROWD THROUGH A HERRING AND ONION BLUR... WITH THE FAILURE OF HIS ASSASSINS, THE REBEL LEADER WAS DOUBTLESS EVEN NOW CRAWLING BACK UNDER SOME CONVENIENT ROCK...
LORD JULIUS! OVER THERE!
EHR OVER...
OHO!


A FEELING BEGINS TO GNAW AT E'LASS' NERVES THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE EXIT..
LADY WYNDMEL WAS ALREADY STIRRING ON HER COUCH ! E'LASS WHIMPERED.. THERE JUST HAD TO BE...
"A WAY OUT...
I GUESS IT'S TRUE "
TAR M DOES HELP THE PURE OF HEART
LOCKED IN CONVERSATION. CEREBUS AND LORD JULIUS FAIL TO SEE THE SECOND FIGURE SLIP QUIETLY AWAY FROM THE FESTIVITIES... .
WELL?
AREN'T YOU GOING AFTER HIM?
CEREBUS THINKS YOU BETTER COME ALONG, TOO"
ME? WHY?
BECAUSE THOSE ASSASSINS ARE GO NG TO BE A TRIFLE PEEVISH WHEN THE CROWD RUNS OUT OF DIR..
AND THEY VE ALREADY BEEN ORDERED TO KILL YOU...

SAY DO YOU MIND IF I COME ALONG?
CEREBUS WOULD BE MOST PLEASED ..
USING HIS COSTUME TO CONCEAL HIS SWORD FROM THE CROWD, CEREBUS LEADS LORD JULIUS TO THE SLIDING STONE PANEL..
E'LASS CONFRONTS THE STONE CORRIDOR BEFORE HIM WITH APPREHENSION. BARELY A DOZEN FEET AWAY IS INKY BLACKNESS
HIS MIND MULLS OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF RETURNING TO THE FESTIVAL AND DROPPING THE DIAMOND ON THE FLOOR --THEN PRAYING NO ONE SEES HIM DO IT..
..BUT IN THE FEW SECONDS IT TAKES TO WEIGH HIS OPTIONS...
THROUGH HERE-- HE'S ONLY HAD A FEW SECONDS HEAD START.
THE DECISION IS MADE FOR HIM...
WHY NOT JUST LET HIM GO? WE CAN BRING A DOZEN MEN IN HERE TOMORROW TO DESTROY ANYTHING THAT MOVES.
HE'S MADE A FOOL OF CEREBUS FOR THE LAST TIME.. CEREBUS IS GOING TO FOLLOW HIM...
.. AND ONE OF ISN'T COMING OUT OF HERE ALIVE..
OH, MIGHTY TARIM-- YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT BESEECHES YOU TO BE MERCIFUL AND STRIKE DOWN HIS ENEMIES WITH MASSIVE CORONARIES

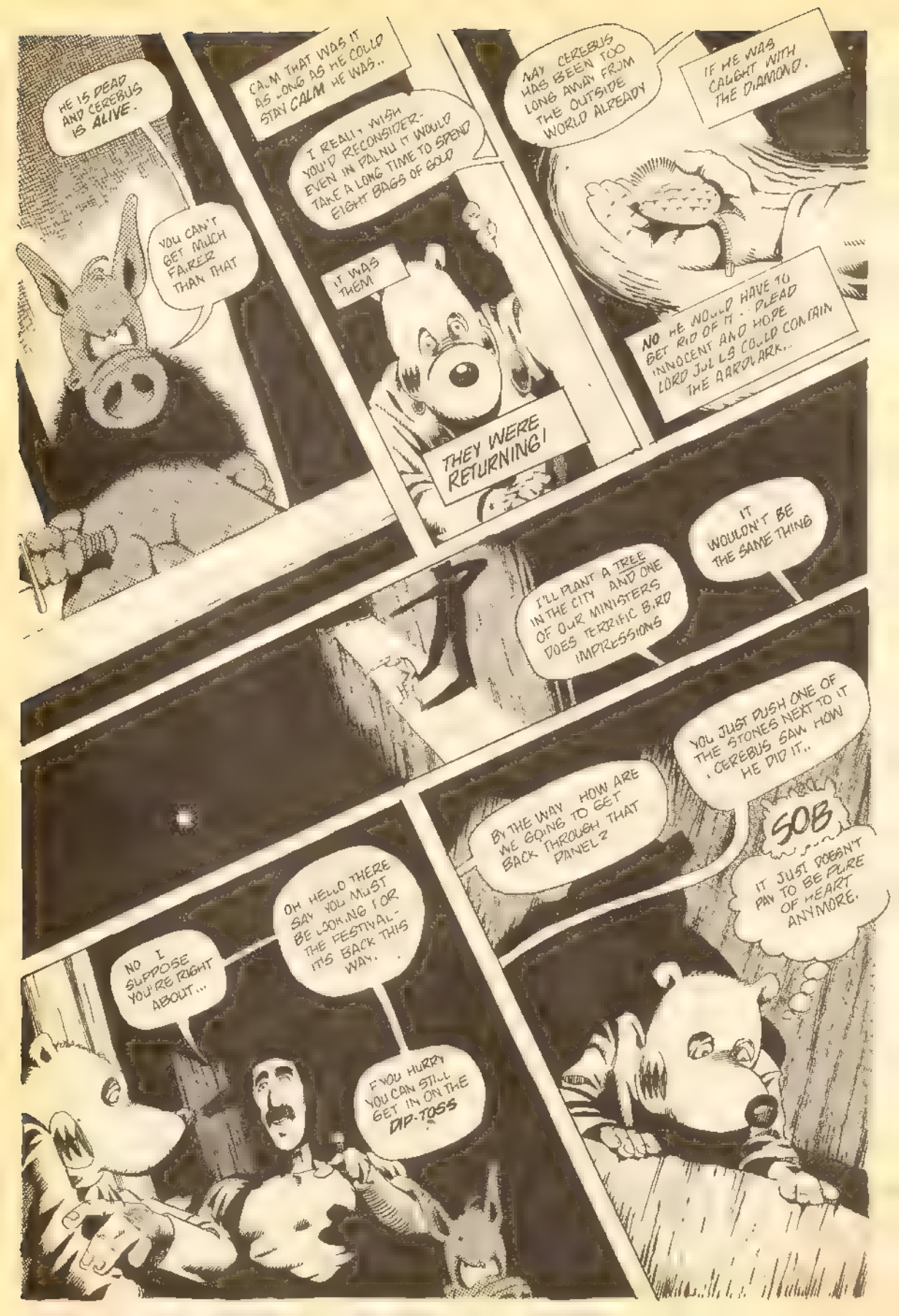
SO TURG HAD BEEN RIGHT. IT HAD TAKEN MORE THAN A YEAR BUT IT SEEMED CEREBUS WAS JUST AS ANGRY AS HE..
E'LASS COULD BARELY CONTAIN HIS AMAZEMENT! THEY HAD GONE RIGHT PAST HIM, AS IF IT HAD NEVER OCCURRED TO THEM THAT HE MIGHT BE HIDING...
E'LASS FELT HIS HEART SWELL WITH PURITY... IN A FEW SECONDS, THEY WOULD BE GONE... LOOKING FOR HIM!
WITH HIS NEWLY-DEVELOPED BOND WITH TARIM, E'LASS WAS CONVINCED HE COULD WALK PAST JULIUS' GLARES WITHOUT A..
THOOM
TARIM! WHAT WAS THAT?
THE SL.D.NG PANEL..
AYE!
CLOSED T.GHT ..
UNDOUBTEDLY, A SIGN THAT OUR QUARRY SEEKS A CONFRONTATION AS MUCH AS CEREBUS DOES...
NO! NO! I DON'T! REALLY -- WE COULD BE FRIENDS! I'LL EVEN GIVE BACK THE DIAMOND...

AS THE SOUND OF FOOT STEPS FADES TO A DISTANT ECHO, GLASS STEALS ONCE MORE FROM HIS HIDING PLACE...
PLEASE, TARIM!
YOU DID IT ONCE JUST OPEN THE PANEL.
I'LL USE THE DIAMOND TO BUILD CHURCHES MONASTERIES
PLEASE OPEN IT... PLEEEASE!
HE HAD COME THIS FAR. HE REFUSED TO GIVE UP! HE FORCED HIS MIND TO SLOW DOWN AND THINK...!
SOMEWHERE UP AHEAD THERE HAD TO BE A DOORWAY OR TUNNEL THAT WOULD LEAD HIM TO THE SURFACE...
CLENCHING HIS TEETH HE RESOLVES TO FIND IT..
AND WHEN HE FOUND IT -- WITH OR WITHOUT TARIM'S HELP...
HE WOULD BE A VERY WEALTHY MAN...
YOU REALLY THINK HE KNOWS WE'RE CHASING HIM?
WE'RE NO LONGER CHASING HIM, LORD JULIUS ...
WE'RE BEING LED!

LED? BUT HOW COULD HE..?
FROM THE TIME WE CAME THROUGH THAT PANEL, WE HAVEN'T ONCE BEEN FACED WITH A CHOICE OF PATHS TO FOLLOW..
THERE HAVE BEEN NO SIDE-TUNNELS, NO DOORWAYS, NO BRIDGES...
IT IS VERY MUCH UNLIKE THE PREY TO LEAD YOU TO HIS HIDING SPOT
BUT IT IS NOT SO UNLIKE THE PREDATOR.
HE IS UP AHEAD - SOMEWHERE - WAITING FOR US!
THERE WEREN'T ANY SIDE TUNNELS! HE HAD WALKED FOR THE EQUIVALENT OF FIVE CITY BLOCKS! WHAT IF THE TUNNEL ENDED UP AHEAD? THEY MIGHT ALREADY HAVE TURNED BACK! IF SO, HE WAS TRAPPED!
I'D PROBABLY BE ABLE TO HANDLE THIS BETTER IF MY STOMACH DIDN'T HURT SO MUCH..
GREETINGS, GENTLEMEN I'VE REALIZED THAT THE SHADOW CRAWLER WAS A --uh MISTAKE..
LARGE POWERFUL, BUT NEESSENCE LITTLE MORE THAN A TRIBAL MASCOT THAT PROVED UNSUITED TO ITS TASK.. *
* CEREBUS #15

NO THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO SETTLE THIS SITUATION! UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD LORD JULIUS, MY FORCES WILL BE LITTLE MORE THAN THE DREGS OF YOUR OWN SOCIETY-- THE MALCONTENTS!
...WITH YOU DEAD, PALNU WILL NEED A NEW LEADER.. THOSE WHO NOW FEAR YOUR POWER AND INFLUENCE..
WILL FEAR NO LONGER! I WILL TRAMPLE YOUR DAMN BUREAUCRACY INTO DUST!
IN A FEW WEEKS LORD JULIUS' REIGN WILL BE LITTLE MORE THAN A BAD DREAM...
IN THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE OF PALNU...
...MY PEOPLE
YOU ARE ALL THAT STANDS IN MY WAY, CEREBUS! STEP FORWARD AND FIGHT FOR WHAT LITTLE HONOUR YOUR MASTER STILL RETAINS..
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR...?
DON'T YOU KNOW IT'S IMPOLITE TO KEEP A PSYCHOTIC WAITING?
CEREBUS IS TIRED OF CITIES... PALNU BEDUIN THEY ARE ALL THE SAME!
CEREBUS NEEDS MORE THAN MODIFIED ANT-HILLS CAN OFFER..
THIS IS A HELL OF A TIME TO DECIDE TO ASK FOR A RAISE!
CEREBUS WILL FIGHT YOUR BATTLE, BUT CEREBUS WANTS EIGHT BAGS OF GOLD AND A HORSE SO HE CAN GET OUT OF THIS..
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA OF THE DENT THAT WOULD PUT IN MY PETTY CASH VAULT? I REFUSE!
THE PSYCHOTIC'S QUARREL IS WITH YOU! IF YOU PREFER, CEREBUS WILL GO NOW, EMPTY-HANDED...
...AND LEAVE YOU TWO TO SETTLE YOUR DIFFERENCES ...

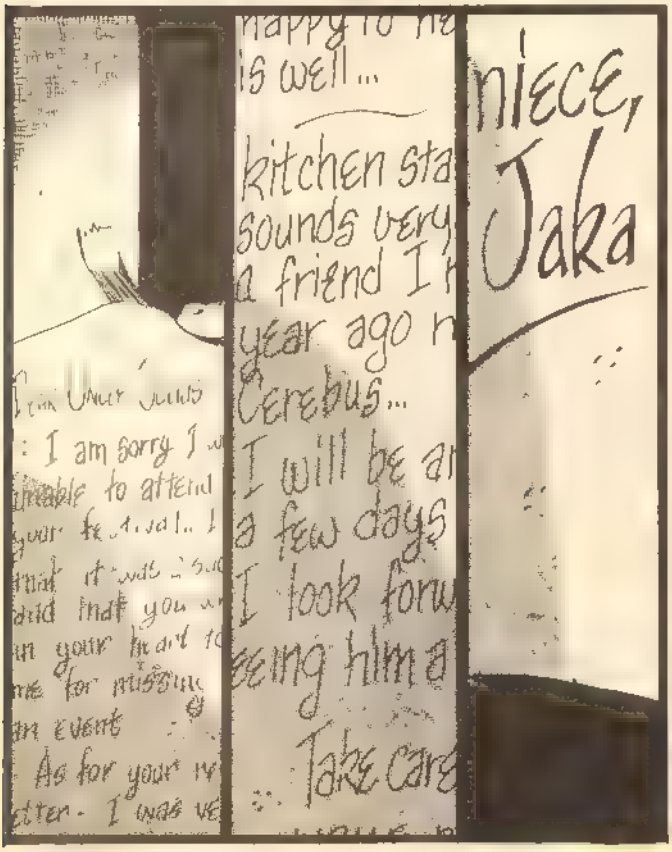
IT'S A GOOD THING FOR YOU I'M AS BIG A COWARD AS I AM
BUT CEREBUS HAS ALREADY MOVED ONTO THE NARROW TILTED BRIDGE.
BUT, BEFORE YOU DIE, LORD JULIUS, IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW WHO WILL SUCCEED YOU!
GAZE THEN UPON THE VISAGE OF
...YOUR SOCIAL SECRETARY!
HAHAHA! YES, LORD JULIUS -- ALL ALONG YOUR GREATEST ENEMY WAS RIGHT UNDER YOUR VERY NOSE!
HOW EASY IT WAS TO CONFOUND YOUR FEEBLE PLANS! HOW YOU MUST HAVE WONDERED AT THIS ENEMY WHO SEEMED TO READ YOUR EVERY...
SSKRAK
THOUGHT
THAT WASN'T EXACTLY FAIR, WAS IT? I MEAN.
..HE THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH WITH SWORDS!


HE IS DEAD AND CEREBUS IS ALIVE.
YOU CAN'T GET MUCH FAIRER THAN THAT
CALM THAT WAS IT AS LONG AS HE COULD STAY CALM HE WAS..
I REALLY WISH YOU'D RECONSIDER. EVEN IN PALNU IT WOULD TAKE A LONG TIME TO SPEND EIGHT BAGS OF GOLD
IT WAS THEM
THEY WERE RETURNING!
NAY CEREBUS HAS BEEN TOO LONG AWAY FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD ALREADY
IF HE WAS CAUGHT WITH THE DIAMOND.
NO HE WOULD HAVE TO GET RID OF IT.. PLEAD INNOCENT AND HOPE LORD JULUS COULD CONTAIN THE AARDVARK..
I'LL PLANT A TREE IN THE CITY AND ONE OF OUR MINISTERS DOES TERRIFIC BIRD IMPRESSIONS
IT WOULDN'T BE THE SAME THING
BY THE WAY HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET BACK THROUGH THAT PANEL?
YOU JUST PUSH ONE OF THE STONES NEXT TO IT . CEREBUS SAW HOW HE DID IT..
SOB
IT JUST DOESN'T PAY TO BE PURE OF HEART ANYMORE.
NO I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT...
OH HELLO THERE SAY YOU MUST BE LOOKING FOR THE FESTIVAL- IT'S BACK THIS WAY.
IF YOU HURRY YOU CAN STILL GET IN ON THE DIP-TOSS

EPILOGUE

LORD JULIUS WATCHES THE HORSE AND RIDER PASS FROM SIGHT.. "WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'LL GO?" "NORTH--SOUTH.. IT MATTERS A LITTLE WHEN YOU'RE RICH." AND THAT WAS IT, TOO BAD, REALLY.. WHO KNOWS WHAT HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO FOR PALNU. AS A GENERAL, HE COULD POSSIBLY HAVE..

MESSAGE FOR YOU, LORD JULIUS...
HAVE YOU GOT CHANGE FOR A GOLD PIECE?
OH, YES, SIR!
GOOD, THEN YOU WON'T NEED THIS COPPER BIT I WAS GOING TO GIVE YOU


happy to he
is well...
kitchen sta
sounds very
a friend I h
year ago n
Cerebus...
I will be ar
a few days
I look forw
seeing him a
Take care
niece,
Jaka

HEY!
OH WELL.
IT PROBABLY WASN'T IMPORTANT...

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the aardvarkian age

by Michael Loubert

(In each issue of Cerebus, Michael Loubert will be examining some of the background on the various places the Earth pig finds himself. This first instalment concerns itself with Lower Felda and Palnu, Cerebus' stomping grounds for the last six issues)

"Such dust! A Tarim forsaken place, these lowlands

'On the contrary"

"What, you ken these dry places?"

'Far from it. But the land is so rid den with religion — far from Tarim-forsaken"

from "Discourses of Theyr"

That was an accurate observat on. Nearly from the beginnings of their histories, the twin Feldan lands of Upper and Lower Felda had been plagued with an excess of religious fervour.

Theyr was visiting The K ngdom of Felda about two centuries before Cerebus arrived on the scene. Felda at the time was wracked by religious civil war. The King, a conservative fellow, had tried to outlaw the new Ezthran Heresy from the capital of Bedruin. The Ezthran were, massacred and the survivors fled east.

There they set up a Puritan religious state, ruled by a dour Council of F ve. All their heretics (i e. orthodox Tarimites) were mercilessly butchered. That started another war, re prisals were answered by more mas sacres, and it is truly surprising that Lord Theyr managed to survive it all to write his famous urbane travelogues.

Anyway, after the smoke cleared and the wars died out, the King in Beduin was murdered by a clique of disgruntled army officers. They proceeded to run the place their way, with the usual attendant corruption and graft. Lower Felda, as it became known, became the target of every wealthy cult in the Feldwar States.

All this concerned the urban dwellers of these lands. In Lower Felda, the peasantry (always the bulk of the population in agrarian societies) tried to ignore the weird goings-on in the cities. They tamely joined the armies when recruiting officers visited the hamlets, and when pushed too far during hard times — such as plague or famine — would dig up their swords buried under their huts and rage about the countryside for a few months.

Then the army would drop by (composed of fellow peasants) and would butcher them. Back to square one. No one gave much thought to the humble tillers of the soil. Their history is unwritten.

The basic foodstuff of the Feld River Lands is wheat. Spell it with a cap tal 'W'. It fed the teeming throngs of Iast and Beduin. It also fed the equally enormous armies of Khaidoge and the Mad Onliu. It was responsible for the growth and eventual fall of the Feldwar States.

The Feld River Lands were the bread-basket of the Aardvarkian Age. The peasants toiled, the overlords told them what to plant and when to reap. In return the surplus wheat went to the cities to be consumed or traded overland to other nations ess fortuna te. It was a great irony that the very nations who spent so much energy keeping the Onliu out were selling them grain to feed the invading armies.

There were problems with the set-up in the Feldwar States. They were never able to expand into the Grass Sea and cultivate it — the Hsifans had a military and political system superior to the fratricidal Feldwin, Iestan and Moreshin arm es were regularly shot to pieces by the Hsifan mounted archers.

The real trouble lay in the nature of Feldwin agriculture. They practiced no form of irrigation. Rainfall was not abundant but sufficient for wheat cultivation. The Feld River Lands had mostly been savanna before the coming of man. The nomads who wandered over it (and still dwelt in the Grass Sea) did no lasting damage to the steppe. They didn't tear up the thin, fragile topsoil with the wooden plows used by later peasants.

The Feld River did leave a deposit of alluvium annually in the valley itself, but the uplands were bare to the wind. Someday the soil would be exhausted, famine would wipe out much of the Feld Folk, and the Hsifans would sweep in to finish off the survivors.

In the meantime, however, things didn't look so grim. Lower Felda was known for other things than exotic cult havens. As de from the "Bread basket" title, Lower Felda was the home of many rich merchants — and not all were schizophrenics like the Cockroach — who made their fortunes from the East-West trade be tween the Shen Steppes and the Southern City-States.

. . .

Perhaps an explanat on is due concerning the rather peculiar political set-up in Palnu.

First, understand that the present Sepran Empire is, in fact a successor state of an older empire. The southern portion had, upon its fall, devolved into the so called 'Southern City-States. Palnu became one of the more powerful of these.

The Sofim river lands reorganized into the Sepran Empire, but the Southern City-States remained independent. In Palnu, an unstable monarchy established itself. It was highly decentralized — the King was elected upon the death of every sovereign. The Electors were the more powerful landholders, and since anyone of 'sufficient noble blood' could be elected foreigners were often chosen. They were easier to manipulate than native Palnin.

Time passed, and the World changed. The Feld states to the East opened new trade routes. The invention of the printing press allowed more specialization in politics, the sciences and economics. The old land based economy slowly gave way to a money-based economy.

This trend was fiercely resisted in Palnu, as elsewhere. Often the strife hid behind religious wars, sometimes the nobility would take advantage of the new money'd class, borrowing cash then driving out their creditors by force of arms. But this state of affairs was not to last long.

Far to the north, on the Grass Sea, the Hsifans had defeated the fanatic Onliu, nomad remnants of a dead civilization. The Onliu fled south, over the Feld River and into the Kingdom of Havaina. This they utterly destroyed, cities and all, and resumed their nomadic life.

A large band of refugees from the devastated kingdom marched to Palnu. Better weaponed and organized they dispersed the feudal rabble Palnu raised and took Palnu City after a short siege. There was little real resistance.

Their leader, Clasa, reorganized the defunct Kingdom. He allied himself with the emergent money'd classes, encouraged trade with Amstanat and the Feld States and stabilized the borders. All private armies were abolished, the Nobles were not allowed to engage in trade, the government or the Army. These replied with revolt, but with their retainers scattered, they were easily crushed and their land divided among the Merchants, who could afford to buy.

Clasa began the custom of selling the Nobles' titles to the Merchants. Then the Bureaucracy went up on the block. With the government so tightly centralized in the City, the outlying provinces became difficult to administrate. More peasants flocked to Palnu City, where the money was. Soon a client system was set up, not unlike that in Rome about First Century. Lord Julius can be taken as fairly typical of the rulers of Palnu.

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AARDVARK COMMENT

221 QUEEN ST S. #1401 - KITCHENER-ONTARIO N2G 1W5

Dear Creators,

I do hope that Cerebus' next birthday is a happier one. Methinks that he is a tad overdue; if for no other reason than to see that 'sinister' grin of his again! I recently picked up issue numbers six to twelve of **Cerebus** and I must say that you've got a winner! Primarily my main hobby is wargaming, and only recently have I started to collect underground comix and art. My favourite artist is Vaughn Bode, but the 'earth-pig' and his friends(?) are a rare and wondrous gem, indeed! I believe that we readers should thank you for the privilege of sharing this fascinating world of yours. But there is one puzzlement that I hope you can solve. Despite the future promise of releasing an explanation and description of Cerebus' lineage, what other non-human critters poke about your world? If the world can give rise to intelligent aardvarks, surely there may/must be other wonderous beasts as well? Perhaps Cerebus will bump into an evil-tempered dragon or an axe-wielding minotaur? Or (dare I suggest) a female aardvark? Will our hero find someone he can love (if only briefly)? Is there anything **more** bizarre on this world of yours?

It must also be pointed out that most humans in your comic don't appear to really appreciate Cerebus' different appearance too much, so I assume that there **are** stranger critters about, or at least some of **his** own kind (Cerebus' that is)???

Lastly, does anyone still have issues 1-5 of CEREBUS on sale? I will keep watch for **Swords of Cerebus** too! Ohh, moan! Cerebus, you've got me hooked.

Jason R. Saylor
4933 York Rd.,
South Bend, In.
46614

You want bizarre? Ronald Reagan as of this writing just about has the Republican nomination locked up. I'm not even going to **try** *to top that one. As to your request for back issues, you're not alone. There were only two thousand of the first five issues printed and four thousand of 6 on. The only source for back issues is Harry Kremer, NOW & THEN BOOKS, 103 Queen St. S., Kitchener, Ontario. He has numbers 2 through 5 available for $3.00 each and 6 through 9 for $1.50 each. They're going fast folks.*

. . .

Dear Dave & Deni:

Welcome to my first letter of comment in twenty years of reading comics.

When not enjoying CEREBUS, I work as a production assistant on the ABC television series, SOAP. I marvel at the high quality of stories our writers tell and performances our actors give. Consistency is rare in continuing presentations in any medium. My praise to CEREBUS the Consistent.

And thank you for your enthusiasm. It shows. The comments before and after the stories are important to my enjoyment of each issue. Reading of A-V's ups and downs, personal and professional, increases my loyalty to the book. I like knowing why things are done a certain way. Marvel and DC may dwarf your circulation, but not your concern for your readers.

I've never been one to buy everything on the newsstand. I have a selection of comics rather than a collection. I treasure my O'Neil/Adams GREEN LANTERN, my Wein/Wrightson SWAMP THING, my Englehart/Rogers BATMAN ... I could go on. I'm proud to display CEREBUS right alongside.

Your labors have brought more joy than any series since The Duck died. Comics are fun again. If you should ever make your way west, perhaps I could buy you and your earth-pig an ale.

Robert Spina,
5223 Auckland Avenue No. 5
North Hollywood, California
91601

As one comics selector to another, I thank you for your very kind words, Robert. Waiter, a tankard of ale with three straws and be quick about it!

. . .

Dear Dave and Deni:

"And what makes you think I'm Necross HAHAHA The Mad?" Loved it. I have never read anything as funny as Cerebus 13, that is until I read Cerebus 14. It would seem that with each edition your writing and art improve; every time I think "He'll never top that!" and Tarim! He does.

I've got to hand it to you; Cerebus is the most professional small time operation in comics at the moment. As far as going monthly is concerned, it was inevitable. However don't push yourself too hard because I would hate to see a deterioration in anything as fine as this comic.

Now then, onto no. 14 "The Walls of Palnu". Lord Julius was great. He seemed (to me anyway) to be a conglomerate of Stan Lee and Groucho Marx. Poor old Cerebus does pick them. Fancy being stuck with that! "Kitchen staff supervisor". Great! Dave, if you keep this up you should have most of your readers hospitalized by mid-1980, by which time they will have busted a gut laughing. (a gut? More likely **all** of them).

Well, I guess that's about it. Barring two things, Cerebus has made it into my top three; that is: 1. My lady 2. Bruce Springsteen 3. Cerebus the Aardvark. If there's anyone in the U.K. who reads the Earth-pig's crazed adventures, drop me a line. I'd love to hear from you.

So keep up the good work, and I'll look forward to every edition from here till eternity.

Terry Whitehead,
19 Yeutree Road,
Beckenham, Kent
BR3 4HT England

Unless your mother is at least no. 4, I'd be very careful about leaving that list of yours lying around. Be sure and let us know if you hear from any aardvarks across the water.

. . .

Dear Dave, Deni and Cerebus,

Cerebus the Aardvark is a very fine series. I got my first exposure to it with issue 14. I'm not exaggerating when I say it's the most enjoyable comic reading experience I've had in years. I've since read 5,7,9 and 10 — all fantastic.

I especially like the story-telling and the stories themselves. Things seem to move along spontaneously and even by random chance, and yet you always tie things up neatly in the end, often projecting new meaning on everything that has gone before. Cerebus is a very re-readable comic.

I hope you'll keep Julius around for awhile; he's one of your most likable characters, and I think his dry wit is an effective foil to Cerebus' grimness.

Sincerely,
Joe Zabel,
185 Maple Drive,
Youngstown, Ohio
44512

You'd probably appreciate how things tie together even more if you could see the fist sized holes in the walls of my studio. Would you believe it took me a week to plot page six of this issue?

. . .

AARDVARK COMMENT

221 QUEEN ST S. #1401 - KITCHENER-ONTARIO N2G 1W5

Dear Dave and Deni,

Cerebus is one of the finest comic book characters I have seen in a long time. The characterization is great and it's the sign of a true comic (as opposed to tragic or dramatic) genius that you could take someone with as many personal flaws and failings as Cerebus and make him likable and sympathetic. Cerebus is one of the great anti-heroes, on par with Wimpy, Snoopy, Major Hoople and my all-time favourite Albert the Alligator.

By the way, I know enough anthropology to have an answer to Larry Will's conjecture about Cerebus being some sort of god. Men have a strange tendency to link any animal that acts more intelligent than man thinks a dumb beast should be to the gods. Cats were linked with deities everywhere from Egypt to India, Bast being the most famous cat-goddess. Monkeys and apes also were considered gods over the same areas, one ape-god, Hanuman, is still revered in India today. The Greeks considered dolphins as messengers of the sea-gods, and also of Dionysus. The dog was probably deified too, though he became so common by historic times that familiarity had bred contempt.

With a condition like that, is it surprising that Cerebus' race has become regarded as the messengers of the gods by some cults? He's smart, clever, far tougher than he looks, and uses tools just like a human. The fact that the Aardvark-gods are worshipped by evil cults could just reflect the selfish aardvark nature.

In closing, I'd like to repeat my admiration for your strip and hand you the unofficial mantle of: "The Logical Successor to Walt Kelly." Thank you for printing the only great comic book now out.

Charles Garofalo
139 Park Lane,
Wayne, New Jersey
07470

If I was Larry Will I wouldn't take this lying down. Anyone else care to join the "Aardvark as god" debate?

NOTES

And I thought we had problems with last issue.

The new cover price reflects the fact that we have had to use drastic means just to remain solvent. One of our major distributors went bankrupt two days after we sent him his copies of 15, we had a cheque for close to $600 bounce from another distributor, we ... well, it's probably better not to talk about it. It looks like things are finally stable for A-V Press — we're just sorry that it took an extra twenty-five cents a book to do it. And we hope you understand.

• • •

I don't know if I mentioned anything about this before, but there will be a ten page Cerebus story entitled "Magiking" (it makes a nice prologue, I think, to 13's "Black Magiking") released from Potlatch Publications of Hamilton sometime in June of this year. It was originally slated for the 1981 COMICS ANNUAL, but this project (which would have featured works by such diverse greats as Gene Day, Jim Craig and others) has been scrapped. Instead, it will come out in the 1981 CHILDREN'S ANNUAL. As soon as I get some information on the price and what-not, I'll pass it along.

• • •

We have heard from a few people who are interested in taking over the NEWSLETTER on a quarterly basis. We are narrowing the candidates down now, and we should have an idea by next issue of who is going to be doing it. It will probably be eight pages long, featuring fan art and articles on the short grey wonder, as well as tid-bits from myself and Deni and even more of Michael Loubert's Aastounding Aardvarkian Aage. Stay tuned for more on this.

• • •

A number of people spotted an AP wirepress story on a new group known as the American Association of Aardvark Aficionados. Based in Westfield N.J. they have designated March 2-8 as National Aardvark Week (Deni even forgot to bake a cake). And this late bulletin on the group, dateline Philadelphia, announces that Jacqueline Tencza, 18, was named the second annual Miss American Aardvark, capturing the title, $25, an aardvark T-shirt and an aardvark calendar that begins in March. The event was held at the Philadelphia Zoo where contestants engaged in an aardvark calling contest, to try and coax Aarchie the Aardvark out of his cage. Anyone knowing of an address for this august body is encouraged to relay it to A-V Press so we can put them on our freebie list.

• • •

Bill Mantlo phoned the studio shortly after last issue went to press, requesting that I do a sample page of HOWARD THE DUCK for the magazine of the same name. I managed to get it done in my spare (hah) time and a few days later Lynn Graeme called to say it had been accepted as a frontispiece for a future issue. Special thanks to Gary Groth and Kim Thompson of the COMICS JOURNAL. It was the reproduced pages in Kim's Cerebus review that prompted Mantlo's phone call. I guess TCJ really is the fanzine the pro's read.

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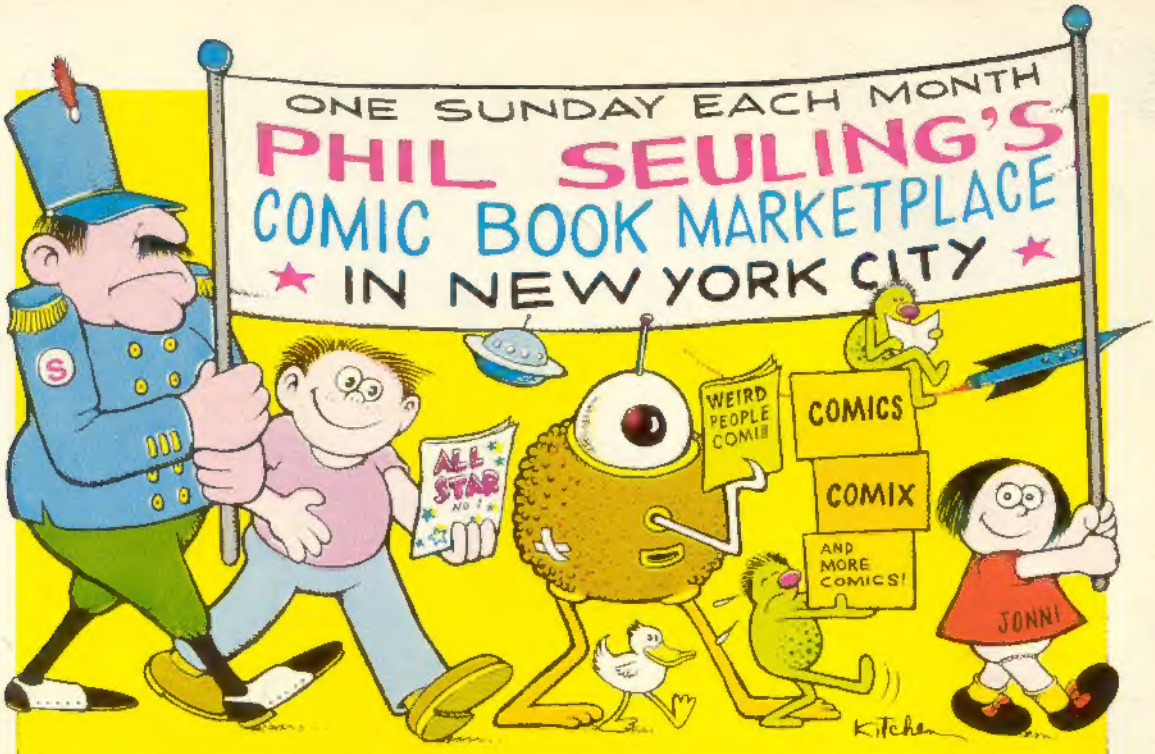

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